



United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Billings Field Office

June 2001



POMPEYS PILLAR INTERPRETIVE CENTER

Environmental Assessment/Amendment for the Billings Resource Management Plan and Activity Plan

EA Number MT 010-1-38



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Billings Field Office
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Billings, Montana 59107
<http://www.mt.blm.gov/bifo/>

6240.2

June 4, 2001

Dear Reader:

The enclosed document is an environmental assessment (EA) for the construction of an interpretative center at Pompeys Pillar. The proposed action, which is the preferred alternative (Alternative B), would amend the 1996 Pompeys Pillar EA/Amendment by:

- (1) reducing the size of the interpretative center;
- (2) providing flexibility in the season of operation, and
- (3) removing the existing visitor center and related infrastructure.

A period for substantive comments on this EA will be open until August 2, 2001. Public notification for this EA is simultaneous with notification requirements that the proposed action would result in construction in a floodplain. Comments on the EA/Plan Amendment that are received by August 2, 2001, will be considered prior to issuing the Decision Record. Comment letters on the analysis can be mailed to Sandra Brooks, Field Manager at the Bureau of Land Management, P.O. Box 36800, Billings, MT 59107. A copy of the completed Decision Record will be mailed to those who received the EA/Plan Amendment and will also be available upon request.

As a participant in the planning process, you have the right to file a protest if you believe that your interests may be adversely affected by the proposed action described in this document. The protest may only address decisions that deviate from the 1996 Pompeys Pillar EA/Amendment, and issues protested must have been submitted for the record during the planning process. Protests must be submitted in the form of a letter to the Director of the Bureau of Land Management by August 2, 2001. This will provide sufficient time for a 30-day protest period, which will be initiated from the time of release of this document. The protest letter should include:

1. The name, mailing address, phone number, and interest of the person filing the protest;
2. A statement of the issue or issues being protested;
3. A statement of the part or parts of the plan amendment being protested;
4. A copy of all documents addressing the issue or issues that were submitted during the planning process by the protesting party, or an indication of the date the issue or issues were discussed for the record;

5. A concise statement of why the proposed decision is believed to be incorrect. This is a critical part of your protest. Take care to document all relevant facts. As much as possible, reference or cite the planning documents, environmental analysis documents, and available planning records (i.e., meeting minutes or summaries, correspondence, etc.). A protest that merely expresses disagreement with the proposed decision without including any data will not provide us with the benefit of your information and insight. In these situations, the Director's review would be based on existing analysis and existing supporting data.

Protest letters should be addressed to:

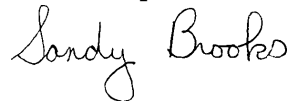
Director, Bureau of Land Management
Attention: Ms. Brenda Williams, Protest Coordinator
WO-210/LS-1075
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

Protests will be decided according to standing of the protester and the merits of the protest. To meet the standing requirement, you (the protester) must show that you participated in the planning process; that the supporting record is the basis for determining standing; and that the protest addresses an issue submitted for the record during the planning process. If an issue was not submitted during the planning process, it may be submitted for further consideration in future plan amendments or decisions but will not be included in the document under consideration. The second requirement, which addresses merits of the protest, deals with whether BLM has followed established procedures and considered relevant information in reaching a decision.

After the protest and comment period conclude, appropriate revisions will be made to the EA, the Decision Record will be issued, and all portions of the Plan Amendment that are not being protested will be approved.

Thank you for your interest and participation in the environmental process. If you have any questions, please direct them to Kim Prill, Team Leader at (406) 896-5038.

Sincerely,



Sandra S. Brooks
Field Manager

Enclosure
Environmental Assessment

POMPEYS PILLAR INTERPRETIVE CENTER

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT/AMENDMENT

for the

BILLINGS RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

and

ACTIVITY PLAN

BILLINGS FIELD OFFICE
BILLINGS, MONTANA

EA Number: MT 010-1-38

Pompeys Pillar Interpretive Center
Environmental Assessment and Plan Amendment
to the
Billings Resource Management Plan

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Environmental Assessment No. MT 010-1-38

On the basis of the information contained in this Environmental Assessment and all other information available to me, it is the determination of the Bureau that none of the alternatives considered constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared. In addition, the amendment to the Billings Resource Management Plan does not affect the entire resource area and does not substantially affect other resource programs to the extent that the resource area would initiate an environmental impact statement.

Sandra S. Brooks
Billings Field Manager

Date

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Pompeys Pillar Interpretive Center Environmental Assessment/Amendment and activity plan proposes to implement a management decision contained in the 1996 Pompeys Pillar EA/Amendment, with a focus on constructing an interpretive center at Pompeys Pillar. Since the 1996 plan was completed, BLM considered a proposal to co-locate the interpretive center with a Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) highway rest area. In addition, new information has been identified which points to the need to re-evaluate the size of the center, as well as other decisions. This EA/Amendment generally conforms with many of the decisions that were made in the 1996 decision record. However, new information was incorporated into this analysis and it also considers new proposals/alternatives.

Provided below is a summary of the pertinent decisions made in the 1996 Pompeys Pillar EA/Amendment. The decisions made in the 1996 decision record were not protested.

- Three management zones were established: a Historic Zone, Historic Zone - Developed and a General Management Zone.

The Historic Zone would be managed primarily to provide visitor access to Clark's signature in a historic setting. The entire area is to be restored to a setting characteristic of 1806. Modifications of the landscape would be the minimum necessary for visitor safety and protection of the signature and other rock art from further deterioration.

The Historic Zone - Developed would provide an area where most facilities would be placed, including an interpretive center and day-use area. Other facilities may be provided at some point in the future.

The General Management Zone would be managed to improve and/or maintain wildlife habitat condition, enhance recreation opportunities and utilize agriculture to facilitate general management. This zone would also provide space, if needed, for maintenance facilities.

- A moderately sized interpretive center (about 11,000 to 12,500 square feet) would be constructed in the Historic Zone - Developed.
- Pompeys Pillar would be managed as a day-use site. The newly constructed interpretive center would be staffed from May 1 to October 31.

- Visual Resource Management (VRM) classes were designated with specific management objectives.

- The existing access road along the west boundary would be closed and reclaimed and a new, all-weather entrance road constructed.

- The existing visitor center would remain.

The focus of this EA/Amendment is to further refine and adjust decisions related to the interpretive center from the 1996 analysis/decision record. The BLM must decide the following:

1. What size interpretive center should be constructed;
2. Where within the Historic Zone - Developed the interpretive center and related infrastructure should be located. The Historic Zone - Developed was selected as the area in which to generally locate an interpretive center in the 1996 decision;
3. Whether the existing visitor center and related facilities should be removed; and
4. What interpretive center operation (season of use) should be provided.

There are two alternatives fully analyzed in this analysis. Other alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed study. A summary of why these alternatives were dismissed is provided in the analysis.

Alternative A represents no change in current management direction from the 1996 decision and is considered to be the "no action" alternative. A new interpretive center (11,000 to 12,500 square feet) would be developed in the Historic Zone - Developed, as well as a highly developed day-use area and trails. The day-use area would be located immediately north of the interpretive center and would be used for multiple purposes. The day-use area would include both islands of shrub as well as open areas for larger functions. A portion of the day-use area would require some clearing (approximately one acre) of underbrush. Large cottonwoods would remain undisturbed, except where there may be overhead hazards.

The interpretive center would be staffed and open to the public from May 1 to October 30. Outside these dates, visitors would be allowed to walk into the site; however, the center would be closed. Existing facilities would remain

and include a small contact station, two vault toilets and other related infrastructure. The existing access road along the west boundary would be closed and reclaimed, and a new entrance road would be constructed.

Alternative B represents the Preferred Alternative. Alternative B was proposed to comply with the general direction of Alternative A, but analyzes a smaller interpretive center in the Historic Zone - Developed. The interpretive center would be approximately 5,700 square feet, with the potential for future expansion. Phase-in components to the center, including a new entrance road, parking area, additional interpretation and potential additions, would be a function of funding and visitation. Development would not exceed the level analyzed in Alternative A. The day-use area would be located further west than the day-use area in Alternative A and would include a portion of the existing day-use area. Although there would still be an open area, it would not require as much underbrush to be cleared. The day-use area would be framed with an irregular vegetation pattern on the border so that it would appear natural.

The interpretive center would be staffed and open to the public from May 1 to October 31. However, there would be flexibility to be open year-round, depending on funding and visitor demand. The existing visitor center would be removed. The existing access road along the west boundary and existing parking area would be closed and reclaimed when a new entrance road is constructed.

Both alternatives are subject to conformance with management common provided in Chapter Two of this analysis. Facility development and activities would be confined/concentrated to avoid impacts to wildlife. Although some updated information is included regarding Threatened and Endangered Species, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service letter of concurrence from the 1996 analysis indicating a "Not Likely to Adversely Affect" is still valid. New information on the spiny softshell turtle (a BLM Sensitive Species and a State Sensitive Species of Special Concern) requires mitigation to avoid impacts to the species. The wetlands/riparian area would be managed for Proper Functioning Condition and the native cottonwood riparian understory within both Historic Zones and wetlands would be managed to allow "no net loss" of these habitat types. Effects to cultural resources would be avoided or mitigated. The visual and scenic qualities of the site would be retained through management direction regarding the actual facility development.

Because the entire area is in the 100 year floodplain, all development activities would conform to all pertinent flood-

plain and environmental regulations, including the Yellowstone County Floodplain Regulations and the Executive Order on floodplain management. Research and studies identified high and low spots within the 100 year floodplain. The proposed location of the interpretive center would be situated on a slightly higher area within the floodplain.

The following alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed study. Refer to Chapter Two for a detailed description as to why these alternatives were dismissed.

- Co-locate an interpretive center with an MDT highway rest area;
- Construct an interpretive center adjacent to State Highway 312;
- Maintain the existing facilities;
- Upgrade and expand the existing visitor center; and
- Locate the interpretive center off-site.

As a result of this analysis, no significant impacts have been identified as a result of the Preferred Alternative (Alternative B). Although there may be some potential impacts to individual wildlife species during their critical nesting period due to the possibility of expanding the season of use, the wildlife populations in the region would not be affected. The Preferred Alternative (Alternative B) has fewer impacts associated with the location of the day-use area; the day-use area utilizes a portion of the existing day-use area, which minimizes the impacts. There are some trade-offs among the Alternatives in terms of the size of the interpretive center. Alternative A would require \$9.4 million, but would provide extensive indoor interpretive opportunities. Alternative B is comprised of phase-in components, with the first phase being \$4 million. Alternative B provides for potential cost savings for long-term operations and maintenance, however, there would be less indoor interpretive exhibit space with Alternative B. Both alternatives, however, can include enhanced outdoor interpretation.

There would be some cumulative effects associated with this project. Within the next few years, there would be a series of construction projects occurring simultaneously, including the proposed action, a Highway 312 overpass project and the potential grain elevator. In addition, the general increase in residential growth in the area, coupled with the increased development, may result in increasing traffic.

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